

A NOTE ON THE COMMON BOTTLENOSED PORPOISE OF THE NORTH
ATLANTIC, *TURSIOPS TRUNCATUS* (Montagu).

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The common *Tursiops* of the North Atlantic is generally known in scientific parlance as *Tursiops tursio* (Fabricius), taking its specific name from the *Delphinus tursio* of Fabricius. During a recent study of Fabricius' species I became convinced that whatever his *D. tursio* might be it was not the bottlenosed porpoise, so common on the Atlantic coast of the United States.

The original description by Fabricius has been learnedly discussed by Eschricht, Holböll, Robert Brown, and others with the view of determining if possible what it really represents, but the principal concern here is to determine what it does *not* represent.

After describing the head of his *D. tursio*, Fabricius proceeds as follows: "Teeth in both jaws distant, with obtuse apex, as in *Delphinus albicans* [= *Delphinapterus leucas*], but larger. Body very thick, as in *Boops* [*i.e.*, humpback whale] and equal with the young of the latter."¹

Now the teeth of the common bottlenosed porpoise are not far apart, and are acute except in old individuals, and are smaller than those of *Delphinapterus*. But most significant of all is the remark that the body equals that of the young of the humpback whale. The young of this whale has a length of from 14 to 18 feet *at birth*, which proportions are never reached by the adult bottlenosed porpoise.

Taking these facts into consideration it would seem out of the question to apply Fabricius' name to our common porpoise. The Greenlandic name reported by Fabricius for his species was *Nesarnak*. Eschricht states that this word means simply "resembling the Nisa." *Nisa* is a name for porpoise adopted by the Greenlanders from the Scandinavian colonists.²

Capt. Holböll had previously stated that the natives appeared to designate the blackfish, *Globicephala*, by this name, but certainly not the porpoise currently known as *D. tursio*.³

In 1868, Robert Brown, in treating of the cetaceans of Greenland, remarked under the head of *Globicephala*: "There seems little doubt

¹ FABRICIUS, *Fauna Grælandica*, 1780, p. 49.

² *Ann. Sci. Nat.*, 5e ser., Zool., I, 1864, p. 209.

³ HOLBÖLL in Eschricht's *Untersuch. über nord. Wallthiere*, 1849, p. 190.

that this is the *Delphinus tursio* of Fabricius, as the Eskimo name *Nesarnak* is applied to the present animal." Finally, to clinch the matter, he states that Montagu's *Delphinus truncatus* (i.e., the bottlenosed porpoise) "has never been found in Davis Strait."⁴

I am unable to find reference to any Greenland specimens of *Tursiops* in the museums of Europe and there are none in the U. S. National Museum.

The correct name for the bottlenosed porpoise is probably *Tursiops truncatus* (Montagu), from the *Delphinus truncatus* described by Montagu in 1821.⁵ The specific name *truncatus* has been employed from time to time by various systematists, including J. E. Gray, but Beddard and other recent compilers have generally made use of the inapplicable *tursio*.

There is a possibility that the *Delphinus siculus* of Rafinesque, described in 1810, is the same as *Tursiops truncatus*, in which case *siculus* would have priority, but Rafinesque's description is so insufficient that there will probably always be a difference of opinion as to the identity of his species. Under the circumstances it seems unwise to give it serious consideration. Rafinesque's description (translated) is as follows:

"**Delphinus siculus.**

"Body oblong, attenuated posteriorly, bluish above, white below; rostrum short, obtuse; teeth equally obtuse. *Remarks:* This dolphin is called 'Fera' in Sicily, and has much affinity with *Delphinus feres* of Bonnaterre, but that is black and has the teeth unequal, alternately longer and shorter. Both differ from *D. phocena* and *D. delphis*, which have the teeth acute, and the last the rostrum also."⁶

Later writers on the fauna of Sicily, so far as I have observed, do not mention the "fera" among the species of porpoises, but Carus states that the common porpoise, or dolphin, *Delphinus delphis*, is known to the Sicilians as "fera comune," so that there is a probability that *Tursiops truncatus* might be known as "fera." The *Delphinus feres* of Bonnaterre is certainly not the same as *Tursiops truncatus*, as the skeleton of one was 14 feet long, the skull 22½ inches long and 17 inches broad, the total number of teeth but 40, and the skin entirely black. It was probably a species of *Globicephala*.

⁴ *Arctic Manual*, 1875, pp. 91-92, from P. Z. S., 1868, with additions and corrections.

⁵ MONTAGU, GEO., "Description of a Species of *Delphinus* which appears to be New," *Mem. Wernerian Soc. Nat. Hist.*, 3, 1821, pp. 75-82, 1 Pl.

⁶ RAFINESQUE-SCHMALTZ, C. S., *Caratteri eri di alcuni nuovi gen. et sp. anim. et piant. della Sicilia*, 1810, p. 5.